attention-degree-information generating section JB1 detects periods Ij serving as information indicating the direction in which the conference participant HM1 faces and a period in which the conference participant HM1 faces in the direction, as shown in Fig. 4(a), and receives switch-pressing ON signals, such as those shown in Fig. 4(b), obtained when the conference participant HM1 presses the switch SW during the detected periods, some of I2 to In and I0, the attention-degree-information generating section JB1 generates information (H1:Aj), such as those shown in Fig. 4(c), indicating that, during a period when the switch-pressing signal is ON, the conference participant HM1 pays attention to the conference participant corresponding to the signal. In the case shown in Fig. 4, when the attention-degree-information generating section JB1 detects I3 and I4 as periods when the switch-pressing signal is ON, among the detected periods, some of I2 to In and I0, the attention-degree-information generating section JB1 generates, as attention-degree information, information (H1:A3) indicating that the conference participant HM1 pays attention to the conference participant HM3 corresponding to the detected period I3, and information (H1:A4) indicating that the conference participant HM1 pays attention to the conference participant HM4 corresponding to the detected period I4, as shown in Fig. 4(c).

In addition to the above cases, it is also possible that the conference participant HM1 explicitly specifies the direction in which the conference participant HM1 pays attention. For example, pushbuttons corresponding to the other conference participants HM2 to HMn and a pushbutton corresponding to a case in which the conference participant HM1 pays attention to none of those participants are prepared, and the conference participant HM1 specifies the direction in which the conference participant HM1 pays attention by pressing the corresponding pushbutton. In this case, pushbutton-pressing information serves as the attention-degree information.

3. Structure of seating-order determination device

Attention-degree information generated by the attention-degree-information generating section JB1 by determining whom the conference participant HM1 pays attention among the conference participants HM2 to HMn according to a behavior or a designation of the conference participant HM1 as described above is transmitted to the information transmitting and receiving section TRB1 in the signal processing device SPD1, and then to a seating-order determination device GJD via the network connection terminal TN1 through the communication network NT.

The seating-order determination device GJD is

structured as shown in Fig. 5.

In Fig. 5, the seating-order determination device GJD is provided with a network connection terminal 72 for connecting to the communication network NT; an information transmitting and receiving section 70 for transmitting and receiving information to and from the communication network NT; and a seating-order determiner 71 for determining a seating order according to attention-degree information sent from the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn, for generating seating-order information indicating the seating order, and for sending the seating-order information to the information manipulation and distribution sections PB of the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn.

More specifically, in the seating-order determination device GJD, the information transmitting and receiving section 70 picks up the attention-degree information sent from the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn among signals passing through the communication network NT, and sends the attention-degree information to the seating-order determiner 71. The seating-order determiner 71 determines the seating order of the conference participants HM1 to HMn attending the conference through the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn, and generates seating-order information indicating the determined seating order.

The information transmitting and receiving section 70